

MURKIN  
(44-38861)

SHOOTING OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BY JAMES EARL RAY

This is the case involving the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, Tennessee, in April, 1968.

At approximately 6:03 p.m., on 4/4/68, while standing on the second-floor balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot and killed when struck by a single bullet. Minutes after the shooting, a white male, was observed as he dropped a bundle on the sidewalk near the scene of the crime and fled. Included in the abandoned articles was a rifle with a telescopic sight which was determined to have been purchased in Birmingham, Alabama, in March, 1968.

Investigation by FBI, Birmingham, revealed that on Friday, 3/29/68, a lone individual purchased a .243 caliber model 700 Remington rifle. The following day this individual returned this weapon, stated that his brother indicated that this weapon was not sufficient and instead purchased a Remington Model 760, .30-06 caliber rifle. This was the rifle recovered in Memphis immediately after the shooting of Dr. King.

Extensive investigation by this Bureau at that time determined the identity of the individual who purchased this weapon as Eric Starvo Galt.

On 4/16/68, the Attorney General authorized the filing of a complaint charging Galt with violation of T18, Section 241, for conspiring to interfere with the constitutional rights of Martin Luther King, Jr.

On 4/17/68, Federal process was obtained and Galt was charged with conspiracy in that he and an individual whom he alleged to be his brother, entered into a conspiracy in Birmingham on 3/29/68, by reason of their purchase of the rifle later used in the shooting of Martin Luther King, Jr.

On 4/19/68, the Attorney General announced that James Earl Ray had been identified through FBI identification records as the Eric Starvo Galt against whom a Federal complaint had been filed.

Ray was arrested on 6/8/68 in London and was extradited.

On March 10, 1969, in state court, Memphis, Tennessee, James Earl Ray entered a plea of guilty to charges of murder and received a 99 year sentence.

Federal process against Galt was dismissed on 12/2/71 by U. S. Commissioner Macy Taylor, Northern District of Alabama, based upon a motion filed by Ray's attorney, Bernard Fensterwald, Jr.

Ray appealed his conviction on grounds that he was not properly represented or counseled by his attorney at the time he entered his guilty plea in 1969. However, a Writ of Habeas Corpus was denied Ray in U. S. District Court, Western District of Tennessee, on 2/27/75.

An appeal of this judgment handed down in the Western District of Tennessee was filed on behalf of James Earl Ray in the U. S. Court of Appeals, 6th Circuit, Cincinnati, Ohio, on 7/7/75. This appeal remains pending.

On 9/19/75, CBS filed a petition in state court, Tennessee, requesting access to ballistics evidence used in the Ray trial which evidence was to be used in connection with a forthcoming documentary on Martin Luther King, Jr.

This petition was denied 9/26/75 on the basis of the fact that Ray's appeal for a new trial remains pending in the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Recently Mr. Reginald Eaves, Commissioner of Public Safety, Atlanta, Georgia, requested that the Department of Justice reopen this investigation based upon information received by Eaves from Robert Byron Watson. Watson had previously furnished this same information to the Secret Service and to the FBI in 1971, and at that time during FBI interview, admitted that the information concerning his knowledge of a conspiracy was fabricated. The statement of Watson and the results of interview were furnished to the Department in 1971 and again in 1975 when received by the FBI, Atlanta, from Mr. Eaves. The Department was also furnished a copy of the results of the investigation conducted by the Atlanta Police Department at the request of Mr. Eaves pertaining to information furnished by Watson. This investigation failed to corroborate any conspiracy theory.

Extensive investigation by this Bureau indicated that Ray acted alone and no evidence of a conspiracy has ever been developed.